

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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SAN JOSE FOR CARACAS LABATT TURNQUIST

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, ELAB, PINT, VE

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT PEREZ ASKS PILOTS TO RETURN TO
WORK--PILOTS ON STRIKE PENDING GOVERNMENT
MEDIATION EFFORTS

REF.: CARACAS 11289

1. SUMMARY: IN CONCILIATORY SPEECH TO NATION SEPT. 21,
PRESIDENT PEREZ RECOUNTED HISTORY OF AIRLINE STRIKE, CLAIMED
MAIN ISSUE WAS LACK OF PROPER NAVIGATION AIDS, AND CALLED FOR
PILOTS TO RETURN TO WORK, AFTER WHICH HE WOULD AGREE TO MEET
WITH THEM TO CONSIDER ANY ISSUES THEY WISHED TO PRESENT. IF
THEY FAILED TO RETURN, THEN FULL SANCTIONS OF THE LAW WOULD BE
APPLIED. PILOTS' ASSOCIATION REPLIED THEY WISH TO MEET
WITH PRESIDENT BEFORE RETURNING TO WORK. MAIN BONE OF
CONTENTION REMAINS STATUS OF ORIGINAL STRIKE LEADERS.
REPORTEDLY GOV IS ATTEMPTING TO MEDIATE WITH PILOTS.

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MEANWHILE, GROUND CREWS ARE NOW SERVICING

ALL NON-VENEZUELAN INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS AND THE CHANCES THAT STRIKE MIGHT SPREAD HAVE BEEN REDUCED. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT'S SPEECH-IN 47 MINUTE SPEECH TO NATION, EVENING SEPT. 21, PRESIDENT PEREZ CALLED PILOTS' STRIKE AN "AGGRESSION AGAINST VENEZUELAN SOCIETY." HE THEN REVIEWED FULLY THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE STRIKE AND THE EFFORTS BY GOV TO RESOLVE IT. HE NOTED THAT THE MAIN COMPLAINT OF THE PILOTS CONCERNED NAVIGATIONAL AIDS, AND RECOUNTED GOV'S EFFORTS TO DATE TO MEET THESE PROBLEMS, INCLUDING A LONG LIST OF SPECIFIC STEPS GOV HAS TAKEN TO MODERNIZE AND IMPROVE AIDS AND AIRPORT SAFETY. PRESIDENT EMPHASIZED THAT THE PILOTS ARE DOING HARM TO VENEZUELAN SOCIETY AS WELL AS TO THEMSELVES, AND APPEALED TO THEM TO RETURN TO WORK. HE AGREED THAT ONCE THEY DO SO, HE WOULD MEET WITH THEM TO CONSIDER ANY AND ALL OF THE GRIEVANCES.

3. THE BONE OF CONTENTION.-ACCORDING TO CIVIL AVIATION OFFICIALS, THE PILOTS HAVE INFORMED THE PRESIDENT THAT THEY ARE PREPARED TO RETURN TO WORK, BUT ONLY AFTER HE RECEIVES THEM. AS NOTED IN CARACAS 11289, THE MAIN BONE OF CONTENTION CONCERNS THE STATUS OF THE STRIKE LEADERS. THE PILOTS ALLEGE THAT THEY WERE MISLEAD BY THE GOV WHEN IT NOTIFIED THEM ON SUNDAY, SEPT. 19. THAT THEY WOULD NOT BE SANCTIONED IF THEY RETURNED TO WORK. THEY RETURNED TO WORK ON SEPT. 20, BUT WHEN STRIKE LEADERS ATTEMPTED TO FLY AIRCRAFT, THEY WERE REFUSED PERMISSION TO DO SO BECAUSE AIRLINE COMPANIES HAD STARTED LEGAL PROCEEDINGS UNDER THE LABOR LAW AGAINST THE STRIKE LEADERS. THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS OF SEPT 21 WERE SOMEWHAT AMBIGUOUS CONCERNING STATUS OF STRIKE LEADERS. THE PRESIDENT SAID IN THIS REGARD THAT "THE COMPANIES HAVE AGREED TO STOP FOR THE MOMENT NEW FIRINGS OR REQUESTS THAT PILOTS BE FIRED." HOWEVER, IT REMAINS UNCLEAR WHETHER THE STRIKE LEADERS WOULD BE PERMITTED TO RETURN TO WORK WITHOUT SANCTION. THIS, APPARENTLY, IS WHY PILOTS CONTINUE TO REFUSE TO RETURN TO WORK.

4. STATUS OF FLIGHTS.-ACCORDING TO WELL-INFORMED SOURCES, ALL NON-VENEZUELAN INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS ARE BEING SERVICED BY GROUND CREWS AT MAIQUETIA AIRPORT AND INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ARE RETURNING TO NORMAL. LOCAL VENEZUELAN FLIGHTS ARE LIMITED TO VERY FEW FLIGHTS BEING FLOWN BY MILITARY PILOTS OR A VERY LIMITED NUMBER OF COMMERCIAL PILOTS. CIVIL AVIATION OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, HAVE MADE PROVISIONS FOR MANAGEMENT OFFICIALS TO TAKE OVER GROUND CREW RESPONSIBILITIES FOR NON-VENEZUELAN INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS SHOULD THE GROUND CREWS DECIDE TO SUPPORT THE PILOTS. IN THIS CONTEXT, HOWEVER, WE THINK LATTER UNLIKELY AND THAT CHANCES STRIKE MIGHT

SPREAD HAVE BEEN REDUCED SUBSTANTIALLY.

5. MEDIATION EFFORT.- WE UNDERSTAND THAT ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENT, A KEY FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL MET PRIVATELY WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PILOTS AFTERNOON OF SEPT 22 IN CARACAS IN AN ATTEMPT TO INDUCE THEM TO RETURN TO WORK. IN ADDITION, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS REPORTEDLY REJECTED A PROPOSAL BY THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS THAT THE GOV ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN NON-UNION DC-9 PILOTS AND NINE DC-9 AIRCRAFT FROM THE U.S. ACCORDING TO RELIABLE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL INVOLVED IN THE MEDIATION ATTEMPT, THE FOREIGN MINISTRY (AND PRESUMABLY THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE) DO NOT WANT ANY OUTSIDE INVOLVEMENT IN THIS PROBLEM WHICH COULD POTENTIALLY CAUSE US AIR CARRIERS TO RAISE OBJECTIONS. IN ADDITION, PRESS REPORTS THAT PRESIDENT PEREZ MET AT NOON SEPTEMBER 22 WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE VENEZUELAN LABOR CENTRAL (CTV), AND FEDECAMARAS (NATIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE) TO EXCHANGE IDEAS ABOUT RESOLVING THE CONFLICT. FOLLOWING MEETING, JOSE VARGAS, CTV PRESIDENT, TOLD REPORTERS THAT THE PRESIDENT INFORMED THE REPRESENTATIVES ABOUT THE CRITERIA THE GOV HAS ESTABLISHED TO SETTLE THE STRIKE. VARGAS SAID, "FOR OUR PART, TOGETHER WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF FEDECAMARAS WE LET THE CHIEF OF STATE KNOW OF THE MEDIATION EFFORTS WE HAVE UNDERTAKEN TO FIND A FORMULA TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM." HE ADDED THAT CTV AND FEDECAMARAS REPRESENTATIVES HAD ASKED FOR AN IMMEDIATE MEETING WITH THE EXECUTIVES OF THE AIRLINES TO SUGGEST WAYS IN WHICH THE PILOTS WHO HAVE BEEN LOCKED OUT COULD RETURN TO WORK, WITH THE COMMITMENT THAT THIS STEP WOULD NORMALIZE THE SITUATION AND THAT THE LEGAL STEPS REGARDING THE ULTIMATE FIRING OF THE STRIKE LEADERS WOULD FOLLOW. THE FEDECAMARAS PRESIDENT JOSE ANTONIO MARTINEZ SAID THAT HE SUPPORTED THE PRESIDENT'S CALL TO THE PILOTS TO RETURN TO WORK LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AFTER WHICH THEY WOULD BE RECEIVED BY THE PRESIDENT.

6. COMMENT: PEREZ' SPEECH WAS CONCILIATORY IN TONE, AND OFFERED OLIVE BRANCH TO THE PILOTS ON THE CONDITION THEY RETURN TO WORK. HOWEVER, ONE CIVIL AVIATION OFFICIAL TELLS US THAT THE SPEECH WAS "TOO WISHY-WASHY" AND SHOULD HAVE BEEN STRONGER IN TONE. PEREZ EMPHASIZED THAT HE HOLDS NOTHING PERSONAL AGAINST THE PILOTS, AND THAT THE GOV WILL MAKE EVERY REASONABLE EFFORT TO MEET THE REQUESTS ONCE THE "ILLEGAL STRIKE" IS OVER. INTENT OF PRESIDENT'S SPEECH WAS TO MOBILIZE PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST THE PILOTS. HE COUNTERBALANCED HIS CONCILIATORY TONE TO SOME DEGREE BY NOTING THAT FULL FORCE OF THE LABOR LAW WILL BE APPLIED IF PILOTS DO NOT RETURN TO WORK. THE GOV CLEARLY WANTS TO SAVE FACE, AND IS APPEALING TO THE PILOTS' PATRIOTISM AND GOOD SENSE IN HOPE OF AVOIDING BEING

FORCED INTO MASS FIRINGS WHICH WOULD WREAK HAVOC WITH BOTH
DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL AVIATION IN VENEZUELA. FEELING
THAT THEY HAVE BEEN ONCE BURNED, HOWEVER, THE PILOTS MAY
HOLD OUT FOR A CLEAR GUARANTEE OF NO SANCTIONS AGAINST THEIR
LEADERS BEFORE ACCEDING TO THE PRESIDENT'S APPEAL TO RETURN
TO WORK.
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